Near-Death Experiences of Drowning Survivors

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Introduction

• 1,200,000 people (1 /30 sec) die by drowning/world (ILS, 2014).
• 1 drowning death : 4 emergency department care for non-fatal submersion injuries in some age groups (CDCP, 2014)= 4,800,000.
• 1 in 5 drowning survivors, report a NDE (about 960,000).
• NDEs: often psychologically profound experiences with substantial and long-lasting implications for NDErs’ lives.
• Lifeguards’ response to an NDE disclosure can influence the trajectory of NDErs’ processes of integrating the experiences into their lives.
• Need for accurate NDE knowledge & recommended interventions.
Aims

• To familiarize lifesaving professionals with the most current research on NDEs and drowning.

• To educate professionals about how to respond most helpfully if they encounter a rescued drowning victim who reports an NDE.
Objectives

1. Present drowning-related NDE accounts.
2. Present research findings about the contents and aftereffects of NDEs in general + in relation to drowning.
3. Provide recommendations that lifeguards can implement to best assist the drowning survivors who may have had NDEs.
Understanding Drowning NDEs

- “Hereafter” (Clint Eastwood, 2014).
- Drowning related NDE (2004 Indian Ocean tsunami): “weightless”, “quiet” place, full of “peace” and “darkness”, “the time had stopped”.
Understanding Drowning NDEs

• “Heaven is for Real” (2014).
• NDE: True story. Experienced Heaven during a miraculous life-threatened surgery. He saw “from above” the doctor operating on his body, his father praying in the waiting room and “met” his miscarried sister.
NDE Scale (Greyson, 1983) Characteristics that a Successfully Resuscitated Drowning Casualty Might Report.

- Thoughts speeded up
- Seeing scenes from one’s past
- Entering some other, unearthly world
- Time seeming to speed up
- Feeling of joy
- Senses more vivid than usual
- Feeling of peace or pleasantness
- Encountering a mystical being or presence
- Seeing deceased spirits or religious figures
- Feeling a sense of harmony or unity with the universe
- Seeing or feeling surrounded by a brilliant light
- Being suddenly able to understand everything
- Being aware of things going on elsewhere, as if by extrasensory perception
- Coming to a border or point of no return
- Seeing scenes from the future
- Feeling of separation from the physical body
“I no longer thought of being rescued, nor was I in bodily pain”

Sir Francis Beaufort
"Your son will die at his 18th birthday"

Dr. Mary Neal
“I ‘saw’ my mother asking the lifeguard to resuscitate me”

Sarah LG.
“You gotta go back; you’ve got work to do”

Matthew Dovel
“I met my little brother. He’s ‘over there,’ where I just was”
“While the lifesaver was resuscitating me, I watched my brother run and hide in the public toilets behind the door.”

Bruna
NDEs and the Provision of Aquatic Health Care to Drowning Victims – During CPR

“If you can see and/or hear me, I am doing what I can to bring you back.

It is Monday, 11 am in Vitoria and I am going to administer resuscitation to you help you recover.”
Assume that he may continue to be psychologically conscious. Narrate out loud / silently:

“People in these circumstances sometimes are able to see and hear people’s conversations and/or thoughts, and this is normal.”
NDEs and the Provision of Aquatic Health Care to Drowning Victims – Conscious After CPR

“During your drowning episode, did anything unusual happen?”

No

Yes

“Would you like to talk about it?”

No

Yes but unable to speak

Yes: Able to speak

“If you come to a point where you do want to discuss it, here is my or another NDE-competent health professional’s contact information.”

“Yes: Able to speak”

“I’m interested in hearing as much as you’d like to tell me” and respond to the disclosure by reflecting back to the survivor, through paraphrasing and summarizing, the main points the survivor is expressing.

“No”

Such experiences have included one or more features. Did your experience include a sense of profound peace? A sense that your consciousness was functioning apart from your body? Seeing your body and/or the scene surrounding the crisis and/or your resuscitation? [continue with other NDE features, ending with a sense of returning to the physical body]. Did you have other features in your experience? Were any aspects of your experience distressing to you?”

Yes but unable to speak

“Such experiences have included one or more features. Did your experience include a sense of profound peace? A sense that your consciousness was functioning apart from your body? Seeing your body and/or the scene surrounding the crisis and/or your resuscitation? [continue with other NDE features, ending with a sense of returning to the physical body]. Did you have other features in your experience? Were any aspects of your experience distressing to you?”

Yes: Able to speak

“You are in the majority of people who remember nothing unusual during their critical events. On rare occasion, people later remember something, and sometimes even people who remember something immediately don’t feel ready to discuss it right away. If, at any time, you remember anything and want to discuss it, feel free to contact me or another NDE-competent health professional.”

“Would you like to talk about it?”
Summary

20% of rescued victims had NDEs while drowning.

Response to an NDE disclosure can facilitate or impair the NDEr’s subsequent integration of the experience.

NDE acronym:

D: avoid the don’ts

N: enact responses that potentiate the most helpful...

E: Effects for the people they rescued.

Lifeguards should be equipped with knowledge/skills to provide quality care.

Most NDEs suggest a pleasurable existence beyond physical death. Nearly all NDErs look forward to returning when their life’s work is completed.

About 10% of NDEs are emotionally distressing, dominated by feelings such as terror, horror, or absolute eternal isolation.
Credits

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The End